

**MINUTES OF THE
BOARD OF PUBLIC HEALTH MEETING
September 14, 2021**

Members Present:

James Curran, M.D., M.P.H., Chair
Misael Rodriguez, M.D., Secretary
Tamica Valliere-White, M.D., F.A.C.S
Cynthia A. Mercer, M.D.
Kathryn Cheek, M.D., F.A.A.P.
Major General Thomas M. Carden, Jr.
Sangmin Ryan Shin, M.D., M.A., F.A.A.O.S.

Members Absent:

John Hauptert, F.A.C.H.E., Vice Chair
Robert Cowles III, M.D., F.A.C.S

The Board of Public Health held its monthly board meeting on September 14, 2021, at 2 Peachtree Street Northwest, Atlanta, Georgia, 30303. The meeting was virtual and was held via Microsoft Teams. An agenda and a list of attendees are attached hereto and made official parts of these minutes.

I. Call to Order and Roll Call:

The meeting was called to order at 1:07 p.m. by Dr. Curran, following a roll call by Dr. Rodriguez. The following members were absent, Mr. Hauptert and Dr. Cowles.

II. Approval/Adoption of Minutes:

Dr. Rodriguez presented the minutes of the February 11, 2020 meeting for discussion and approval. There was no discussion. The minutes passed unanimously.

III. Commissioner's Report:

Commissioner's Report by Commissioner Kathleen E. Toomey, M.D., M.P.H.

Commissioner Toomey opened by thanking board members, Dr. James Curran, Chairman for his help and partnership throughout the pandemic, Dr. Kathryn Cheek, for advising her on how to open schools safely during the COVID-19 pandemic, Major General Thomas Carden for being a partner throughout the pandemic for testing and vaccinations, and Dr. Cowel who promoted vaccinations in Oconee County.

Dr. Toomey also introduced new staff at the Department of Public Health (DPH). She said that Melanie Simon would be the new General Counsel who comes from the Department of Community Health, and Alex Millman will take the role as the new Chief Medical Officer. She also said that Dr. Millman will oversee all medical programs within DPH including the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).

During her report Dr. Toomey said that 20 years ago, she was in this same exact room (15-300), she said that she's the only current state health official that was here during 9-11 and being here through both extraordinary difficult events was a privilege.

Continuing with her report the Commissioner identified the disconnect between local, state, and federal data systems. She said there were issues with the vaccination system, testing, and there was also inadequate medical supply. Dr. Toomey said we didn't have the surge capacity to meet the national demand for contact tracing for a disease that would have millions of cases. However,

this pandemic has offered us a once in a century chance to transform our public health system into an integrated health system for state-of-the-art data reporting, staff training and development, collaborations for staff with universities of the business community, and to no longer have siloed health systems. The time to be building these new systems and partnership should not be in the middle of a pandemic, but it should be our standard of public health care, said Dr. Toomey. She said the plan is to use grant funds from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to build ideal systems creating a public health data system of the future that includes updated data collection, reporting linkages to private sectors providers, as well as a uniformed electronic medical record in public health for the first time. Support from the Georgia Legislature and General Assembly to modernize our Surveillance System of the Future has been received. This system will allow us to collect and analyze infectious diseases and other health issues, said Dr. Toomey.

Closing her report, Dr. Toomey thanked Dr. Curran and Dr. Alison Chamberlain with great gratitude for their vision to work with DPH and the Woodruff Foundation to create the Fellow's Program that created a mini EIS program which trained public health professionals, and epidemiologists. She said meeting these critical staffing needs will build public health leadership of the future. Dr. Toomey also acknowledge and thanked all public health staff for their hard work during this pandemic.

IV. New Business:

A. Epidemiology Updates- Cherie L. Drenzek, D.V.M., M.S.

Cherie Drenzek, State Epidemiologist and Chief Science Officer provided a snapshot of COVID-19 in Georgia. Dr. Drenzek said that there's more that 1.5 million cases, 76k hospitalizations, and over 23k deaths. She also stated that 60% of COVID outbreaks are now in K-12 schools. And after the 4th of July weekend the Delta Variant began to spread in Georgia. She said that statistics show for the state of Georgia nearly 99.9% of COVID deaths and hospitalizations have occurred in unvaccinated people. Currently 53% of Georgians have had at least one dose of the COVID vaccine.

Concluding her report, Dr. Drenzek expressed how critical it is for individuals to get vaccinated, to wear a mask, to practice social distancing, and to stay home when you are sick or if you have been exposed to COVID-19.

B. COVID Vaccination & Testing- Chris Rustin, Dr.Ph, M.S., R.E.H.S

Chris Rustin, Senior Advisor to the Commissioner, and Incident Commander for Vaccine Planning/ Logistics, presented on COVID Vaccination & Testing. In his opening he did a quick look back on COVID-19 in January of 2021. He stated that during that time all states were under a population – based allocation system due to limitations on the vaccine supply. During the beginning of COVID Dr. Rustin stated that vaccination would be prioritized based on risk of exposure and risk of severe outcomes from COVID infection. The oldest population was vaccinated first. As of September 14, 2021, over 10 million vaccines have been administered. Most of the vaccines have been Pfizer, 40% have been Moderna, and 2% have been Johnson & Johnson. Dr. Rustin said that Pfizer is the only vaccine that can be administered to adolescents.

Dr. Rustin shared that Georgians can receive the COVID vaccine from over 5,000 COVID providers statewide. These providers include local health departments, hospitals, primary care physicians, pediatricians, FQHCs, pharmacies, colleges, long-term care facilities, correctional facilities, and dialysis centers.

Ending his report Dr. Rustin said that the goal at DPH is to normalize COVID-19 vaccinations.

C. COVID- 19 Communications Update- Nancy Nydam, Director of Communications

Nancy Nydam, Director of Communications provided statewide communications efforts on COVID-19 and how they were developed. She said she knew DPH would need new tactics, tools, and technology to get information out to the public regarding COVID. In order to do this the Georgia Department of Public Health redesigned their website which included guidance and information. Daily interactive data reports including the number of tests, confirmed cases, hospitalizations, death, and vaccines administered by county and demographics were added to the website.

The communications department produced campaigns providing COVID awareness. The three main messages projected were testing, contact tracing, and prevention. Billboards were displayed across Georgia, digital video boards were placed in the Atlanta Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, and digital print ads were placed on MARTA and in the Atlanta Journal Constitution. Television, radio, and mobile ads were aired as well to get messages, questions, and concerns out about the coronavirus to the community.

D. 2021 Legislative Session- Megan Andrews, J.D., Assistant Commissioner for Policy

Megan Andrews, Assistant Commissioner for Policy presented on the 2021 Legislative Session. During her presentation she announced the following House and Senate Bills were passed, 146- Paid Parental Leave for Eligible State Employees, 156- Sharing of Information and Reporting Cyber Attacks, 287- Tobacco and Vapor Products in Course of Instructions, 307- Georgia Telehealth Act, 346- Jarom's Act, 567- Newborn Screening and Genetics Advisory Committee, Senate Bills 32- Personal Records of State and Federal Employees, and Bill 46- Certain Medical Personnel to Administer Vaccines. House Resolution 52- House Study Committee on Childhood Lead Exposure and Senate Resolution 151- Senate Sickle Cell Anemia Study Committee were also passed.

During her presentation Megan shared that the budget for fiscal year 2021 provided a one-time salary supplement of a \$1,000 to full-time state employees with salaries less than 80k. Funds were also provided for a Chief Medical Officer, Deputy Commissioner, Chief Data Officer, Senior Programmer, and Financial Manager. In addition, funds were giving to the AIDS Drug Assistant Program (ADAP) and to the Surveillance System to improve COVID-19 response.

In conclusion, Megan announced that for fiscal year 2022 funds for newborn screening, feminine hygiene products in facilities, Georgia CORE, sickle cell, nursing peer assistance program, Grady, PreP, and funds for Public Health Multi- Projects will be increased.

V. Board Comments

Dr. Curran wanted to know why was the age 13 allowed to be vaccinated? Why not age 5? Megan Andrews stated: 13 was the existing age by law for the flu shots, and pediatricians requested that the same age range be mirrored. Dr. Curran also asked if school nurses could administer the vaccine? Yes, school nurses can give the vaccine under a protocol agreement said Megan Andrews.

VI. Adjournment:

There being no further business to be brought before the board, Dr. Curran motioned for adjournment of the meeting. The motion passed unanimously. Dr. Curran adjourned the meeting

at 2:59 p.m.

THESE MINUTES ARE HEREBY APPROVED AND ADOPTED THIS THE 9th DAY OF NOVEMBER 2021.

John Hauptert, F.A.C.H.E.
Vice Chair

Misael Rodriguez, M.D.
Secretary

Official Attachments:

1. List of Attendees
2. Agenda

September 14, 2021

Board of Public Health Meeting Attendees

Board Members

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Attendees

Public broadcast meeting online.